

BOOK REVIEWS

of common struggles. Maternal empowerment, she argues, should not just be concerned with empowered parenting, it must also include attention to a mother's agency "in the context of her own life" (13). "Why can we not simply demand that motherhood be made better for mothers themselves?" (15), she asks. O'Reilly argues that not only are mothers' needs often ignored to the detriment of their ability to successfully fulfill their many responsibilities, thus leaving primary caregivers vulnerable to social and economic risk; mothers also "remain disempowered despite 40 years of feminism" (25).

The anthology is divided into seven sections: *Becoming a Mother*; *Maternal Identities*; *Maternal Advocacy*; *Maternal Activism*; *Violence, Militarism, War, and Peace*; *Social Change and Social Justice*; and *Writing, Researching, and Performing Motherhood*. Each of the 81 chapters features a particular organization. While the diverse issues these groups have taken up vary from birth options to environmental and anti-military activism and issues of human rights, what connects them is their members' passion, focus, and often their remarkable audacity or courage. Although most organizations are currently active, a small number are included for their historical significance to contemporary maternal activism. Each individual chapter outlines the history, mandate, and activities of the organization, as well as some of the challenges it has faced and how these were addressed and overcome. In addition, each chapter articulates how the organization is linked to the broader motherhood movement.

Although a number of the organizations covered in this book were familiar to me, I learned something new from each chapter. Without exception, each chapter illustrated the interconnection of maternal practices and activism. This book, a masterfully and collectively written work that is both a significant contribution to the field and a clarion call to action, will hold special appeal for readers interested in motherhood politics. It might be better suited to an electronic (and updatable) format, however. At 976 pages of small print, it is a massive, unwieldy tome.

Parenting Out of Control: Anxious Parents in Uncertain Times

Margaret K. Nelson.

New York: New York University Press, 2010.

Reviewed by Clare O'Hagan

A book that adds to our knowledge and understanding of the issues and challenges facing parents and the strategies parents adopt in contemporary, high-

ly individualized, neo-liberal society is always welcome. Margaret Nelson's readable and accessible book promises a holistic examination of parenting in the United States amid social, cultural, and technological changes. The first part of the book is devoted to parenting styles, while the second part explores how parents engage with technology.

Nelson classifies her parent respondents into two groups based on their education: the professional middle class, those with a graduate degree or higher, and the middle and working class, those with an undergraduate degree or lower. Whether education alone is a clear enough indicator of class position is questionable, as is the inclusive grouping of working and middle class. While she acknowledges there are difficulties with this classification, Nelson applies it throughout the book in order to juxtapose two contrasting parenting styles, focusing in the main on professional middle class parents, whom she describes as "elite" parents.

"Parenting out of control" is the term Nelson applies to the parenting style of professional middle class parents, while "parenting with limits" is her term for the parenting style of working and middle class parents. "Parenting out of control," according to Nelson, suggests the way "elite" parents "find themselves in a bind that is ... of their own making. They may not want their children to grow up too fast, but they cannot and will not simply allow their children to be children" (82). These parents are intense nurturers of their children. Their style of parenting relies on communication, negotiation, flexibility, trust, and being endlessly and immediately available. They hoard advantages, are intensively involved in their children's education and activities—hence the popular term "helicopter parents." On the other hand, "parenting with limits" is the style adopted by working and middle class parents who want their children to develop skills that will ensure self sufficiency. These parents are less interested in intimacy and engagement than they are in clear rules of authority.

Nelson finds that "elite" parents shun technological aids such as child locators, GPS tracking devices, V-chips, and drug testing kits and rely instead on trust and negotiation. Working and middle class parents are more receptive to these technologies and their potential to set and maintain limits on their children. However, "among the elite, parental trust hardly exists ... parents engage in a wide range of 'sneaky' behaviors ... to maintain the illusion of a trusting relationship" (161). "Parents out of control" deserve a more sympathetic treatment than they receive in this book.

There are interesting and engaging descriptions and quotations in Nelson's book, which reveal respondents' attitudes to many aspects of parenting. It is clear from these descriptions that gender, ethnicity, family status, age, income, and family size also affect parenting styles, but these variables, as well as social and cultural factors, are given insufficient attention and analysis by Nelson.